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General and complete disarmament: relationship between disarmament and development

Relationship between disarmament and development

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 53/77 K.

In accordance with the decision taken by the Secretary-General, the high-level Steering Group on Disarmament and Development was established. It held its inaugural meeting on 26 May 1999. The purpose of the Steering Group is to determine the short, medium and long-term priorities from a broadly defined mandate as contained in paragraph 35 (ix) b of the action programme adopted at the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, within the framework of current international relations.

The Steering Group has identified specific programmes and activities, including the holding of periodic seminars/symposia to focus on specific issues in the disarmament and development field. The first of a series of symposia/seminars was held at United Nations Headquarters on 20 July 1999.

In a note verbale of 18 March 1999, the Secretary-General drew the attention of Member States to paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 53/77 K. To date, the Secretary-General has received two replies.

* A/54/150.

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I. Introduction

1. Since 1987, the General Assembly has annually requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the Action Programme adopted by the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, which was held at United Nations Headquarters in September 1987. Paragraph 35 (ix) of the action programme emphasized the need to strengthen the central role of the United Nations and its appropriate organs in the field of disarmament and development in promoting an interrelated perspective of these issues within the overall objective of promoting international peace and security. The action programme also called for greater efforts by the United Nations to promote collective knowledge of non-military threats to international security.

2. The present report is submitted in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 53/77 K of 4 December 1998.

3. In paragraph 9 of his previous report to the General Assembly, dated 3 August 1998 (A/53/206), the Secretary-General referred to the restructuring of the political and economic sectors of the Secretariat, and expressed his intention to establish the high-level Steering Group on Disarmament and Development, with the following composition: the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs; the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs; and the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Department of Disarmament Affairs was designated to provide coordination and substantive servicing of the Steering Group. In paragraph 10 of that report, the Secretary-General indicated that the Department of Disarmament Affairs was exploring the possibility of organizing periodic workshops, and noted that in view of the continuing financial constraints on the Organization, this proposed activity would become more affordable with voluntary contributions by Member States.

II. Action taken

4. In accordance with the decision taken by the Secretary-General, the high-level Steering Group on Disarmament and Development was established. It held its inaugural meeting on 26 May 1999. The meeting was convened by the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs in his capacity as the coordinator of the Steering Group. The Steering Group consists of the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, and Administrator of UNDP and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, who joined at the invitation of the Steering Group. The Steering Group will meet as and when necessary. A modality for working level contacts has been established in order to ensure coordination and implementation of the programmes and activities approved by the Steering Group.

5. The purpose of the Steering Group is to determine the short, medium and long-term priorities from a broadly defined mandate as contained in paragraph 35 (ix) b of the action programme adopted at the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, within the framework of current international relations. To achieve that purpose, the Steering Group will specify assignments for relevant parts of the Secretariat, and establish modalities for their cooperation with the Department for Disarmament Affairs.

6. At the inaugural meeting of the Steering Group, the need to revisit disarmament and development was emphasized in the light of the various changes that had taken place in the international situation since the 1987 conference, notably the end of the cold war and the new development agenda resulting from the development-related global conferences organized by the United Nations. The devastating impact of civil conflicts on development and the destabilizing effects of the spread of small arms had added new dimensions to the subject of disarmament and development. Other issues that have come to the forefront include the conversion of military facilities to productive civilian uses, which some countries attempting transition have tried to come to grips with and which some post-conflict societies are likely to face as a major challenge.

7. The Steering Group reviewed issues of disarmament and development, with particular reference to the following: conversion; conflict-prevention; causes of conflict and arms acquisition; post-conflict practical disarmament measures; military expenditure; the role of other United Nations departments/agencies as well as international organizations, such as the World Bank; international events relevant to the issue of disarmament and development, such as the conference series on new democracies; availability and dissemination of factual and analytical material on disarmament and development; the lessons learned by UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in post-conflict situations, including the issue of early warning; and the significant role being played by NGOs in the disarmament and development field and their interaction with the United Nations.

8. The Group also discussed the Brussels Call for Action, adopted by the International Conference on Sustainable Disarmament for Sustainable Development, which was held

at Brussels in October 1998. That Conference identified two critical developments that had to be confronted in responding to violent conflicts in the post-cold war era (see A/53/681):

(a) The toll of human and material destruction in war-torn and conflict-prone areas is spiralling to such an extent that development resources are more and more diverted to emergency and rehabilitation operations. Worse, the growing number of intra-State conflicts destroys the development potential of affected communities and impedes the prospects for future sustainable development;

(b) There is an ever-increasing international awareness of the need to tackle the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons since these have become prominent as major instruments of violent conflicts. Their widespread availability erodes negotiated peace settlements, prolongs conflicts, and hampers conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction, thereby perpetuating insecurity and instability, as well as undermining the basis for sustainable development.

9. The Steering Group adopted a forward-looking approach for revisiting disarmament and development, and advocated a close interaction between the United Nations and civil society in this area. It noted that non-governmental organizations had a significant role to play in advancing the objectives of disarmament and development. The Steering Group also agreed that its activities should have a significant information gathering and dissemination component with a view to informing and enhancing public awareness of latest developments in the disarmament and development field.

10. The Steering Group has identified the following programmes and activities:

(a) The ongoing work in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on public sector budgetary issues would include a sharper focus on military expenditures, arms trade and other disarmament-related issues. The goal would be to develop an information and statistical database which would be useful for public use and reference;

(b) Based on the database available with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, analytical material on the economic and social impact of military expenditure would be published periodically;

(c) The analytical material being produced by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the issue of conversion would be published in a more high-profile manner and with a view to reaching out to a wider public;

(d) The Steering Group would seek to increase operational work in the area of practical disarmament measures, such as development-oriented weapons collection projects in post-conflict societies along the lines of the pilot project in Albania, in which the Department of Disarmament Affairs and UNDP are currently involved. The Steering Group also advocated other approaches, such as the monitoring and facilitating the implementation of arms moratorium, as is being done in West Africa, involving member countries of the Economic Community of West African States;

(e) Organizing periodic seminars/symposia to focus on specific issues in the disarmament and development field, and providing a forum where relevant United Nations bodies, NGOs and other international agencies could share their experience in areas of shared concerns.

11. A symposium on disarmament and development was held at United Nations Headquarters on 20 July 1999. This was the first of a series of periodic events aimed at highlighting and promoting a better understanding of disarmament and development issues. The event was organized in collaboration with Economists Allied for Arms Reduction, a non-governmental organization based in New York.

12. The issues discussed at the symposium[1] included the following: military spending; conversion; small arms proliferation; civil and inter-State conflict; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; post-conflict peacebuilding; the peace dividend; and development assistance. Professor Lawrence R. Klein, a Nobel laureate in economics, who chaired the meeting, observed that disarmament did not automatically lead to development, nor development to disarmament. This underscored the need for formulating and implementing policies that would establish a positive interrelationship. On the question of the "peace dividend", he referred to studies which showed that significant macroeconomic gains had resulted from the cutback in military expenditure by the United States after the end of the cold war. As a general rule, the positive effects of reduced military spending should be assessed on a long-term basis since the benefits at the macro level may not be apparent over the short run. The Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, who inaugurated the symposium, observed that disarmament had gained recognition as a pre-eminent tool of preventive diplomacy and peace-building.

13. In a note verbale of 18 March 1999, the Secretary-General drew the attention of the Member States to paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 53/77 K. To date, the Secretary-General has received two replies, which are contained in section III below. Any further replies will be issued as addenda to the present document.

III. Information received from Governments

Bangladesh

[English]
[30 April 1999]

The constitution of Bangladesh is explicitly committed to "... *the principles of respect for national sovereignty and equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, peaceful settlement of international disputes, and respect for international law and the principles enunciated in the United Nations Charter*". It also states that Bangladesh shall "... *strive for the renunciation of the use of force in international relations and for general and complete disarmament*; ...".

It is in this vein that Bangladesh has taken a principled position to oppose consistently any kind of military build-up and armed intervention across the regions, both regionally and globally. Development agenda has always assumed highest priority to successive Governments in Bangladesh. In pursuance of the commitments made at the major United Nations conferences of the 1990s, Bangladesh has been devoting increased resources to address basic social issues like poverty, health, sanitation and women and children's rights.

Military expenditure in Bangladesh, averaging about 2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), has so far remained reasonably low compared to countries or those in similar economic condition. The annual purchase of arms, ammunition, logistics, now available through the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, eminently testifies Bangladesh's diminished involvement in armament.

In recognition of Bangladesh's commitment to peace-building, over the years it has emerged as one of the largest troop-contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping forces.

Armed forces in Bangladesh have effectively engaged from time to time in handling natural disasters and to bolster relief and rehabilitation efforts. At the United Nations, Bangladesh has always been in the forefront of all efforts aimed at benefiting from the peace dividend as a result of closer linkage between disarmament and development.

Cuba

[Spanish]
[27 May 1999]

It is a fact that the United Nations, almost since its inception, has sought to establish a relationship or link between disarmament and development. Through numerous resolutions, adopted by the majority of Member States, it has urged a general reduction in military expenditure and requested that the resources released should be used for social and economic purposes, in particular to benefit the developing countries.

Given the recognized and authentic relationship which exists between disarmament and development and because it is immoral and unacceptable to squander resources on armaments while the needs of billions of human beings so unsatisfied, the final document resulting from the first special session devoted to disarmament, held in 1978, included various references to the question in its paragraphs 16, 35, 89, 94 and 95.

It is worth emphasizing the acknowledgement in one of those paragraphs that there is "a close relationship between disarmament and development. Progress in the former would help greatly in the realization of the latter. Therefore resources released as a result of the implementation of disarmament measures should be devoted to the economic and social development of all nations and contribute to the bridging of the economic gap between developed and developing countries".

Subsequently, in 1987, the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development broke new ground by recognizing for the first time at the multilateral and intergovernmental level the interconnection between the two phenomena and by including in its final document, which was adopted by consensus, the idea of an interrelated perspective on disarmament, development and security.

Yet, the vast majority of developed countries, especially those which possess the largest arsenals of weapons of every kind, have, in the opinion of Cuba, failed thus far to heed the urging of the international community. Far from diminishing, the military budgets of States, of the major nuclear Powers in particular, have continuously grown and have even tripled. The Power with the greatest military might in the world has based its hegemonistic and interventionist policy on the indiscriminate use or threat of force, engaging mankind in a spiralling arms race which seriously endangers peace and the very survival of man.

With mankind now having the means to annihilate itself several times over, it seems to us that, paradoxically, it is increasingly clear that the arms race, far from guaranteeing greater security, poses increasingly grave and urgent threats to international peace and security.

It is therefore a matter of genuine frustration for Cuba that the decisions which the majority of the Members of the United Nations agreed to adopt at the 1987 International Conference have been deliberately ignored to date. Furthermore, our feelings of incredulity and indignation are accompanied by the conviction that many of the economic and social problems which overwhelm and cause distress to the majority of human beings could be alleviated in considerable measure if only a fraction of the resources devoted to military expenditures were utilized for the noble objective of the progress and well-being of the peoples of the world.

We recognize and are gratified by all the initiatives taken within the framework of the United Nations to follow up the decisions adopted at the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development. We are also deeply appreciative of the Secretary-General's efforts to implement each one of the legislative mandate given to him by Member States.

Accordingly, we welcome the establishment of the high-level interdepartmental Task Force to foster and coordinate the incorporation of the disarmament-development perspective in the activities of the United Nations system, and we are satisfied with the action it has taken.

We also welcome the proposal regarding the high-level Steering Group on Disarmament and Development. We shall closely monitor its establishment and shall consistently advocate its consolidation within the Secretariat, under the coordination of the Department of Disarmament Affairs.

At the same time, we continue to view with concern the poor or zero response in this context by countries which could divert more resources from the arms race to economic and social development efforts at the international level: we are talking about the developed countries, in particular the countries with the largest military budgets.

Regrettably, while billions of dollars are being squandered on the arms race, only a small number of countries belonging to the first world have given the agreed figure of 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product as a contribution to the development of the developing countries.

In the interest of ensuring that this matter is accorded within the framework of the United Nations the importance which it deserves and which has been confirmed in various important documents adopted by its Member States, Cuba is perfectly willing to have it included as one of the future items in the agenda of the Disarmament Commission. This step should facilitate a useful exchange of views and should generate new proposals which may help to break the current deadlock.

Cuba is also willing to promote and support the possibility of introducing the issue in the Conference on Disarmament, as it firmly maintains that the relationship between disarmament and development is a topic that can be negotiated in that forum. This step would add one more to the spectrum of initiatives undertaking with a view to achieving general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

In addition, Cuba emphasizes the need to comply with paragraph 35 (ix) of the final document of the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, which calls for the strengthening of "the central role of the United Nations and its appropriate organs in the field of disarmament and development, in promoting an interrelated perspective of these issues within the overall objective of promoting international peace and security". We should particularly like to see the analysis, on a regular basis, of the impact of global military expenditures on the world economy and the international economic system, as one more means of sensitizing world public opinion.

Lastly, Cuba reaffirms that the absurd logic which claims that it seeks greater security through the launching of a vast arms-race programme has let the world, paradoxically, to the moment of greatest peril, least security and most fragile stability in all its history, and brought mankind face to face with the very real possibility of total and final self-annihilation. The arms race currently confronting human beings is truly the most direct and immediate threat to their survival. Stopping and reversing the trend is, without the shadow of a doubt, the most vital contribution which can be made today to the cause of peace and of international security.

Notes

[1] The panel of speakers consisted of Professor Lawrence R. Klein (also Chairperson); Professor Michael Klare of the International Action Network on Small Arms, a coalition of non-governmental organizations; General Emanuel Erskine, former Force Commander of the United Nations Force in Lebanon; David Gold of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and Victor Angelo of UNDP.